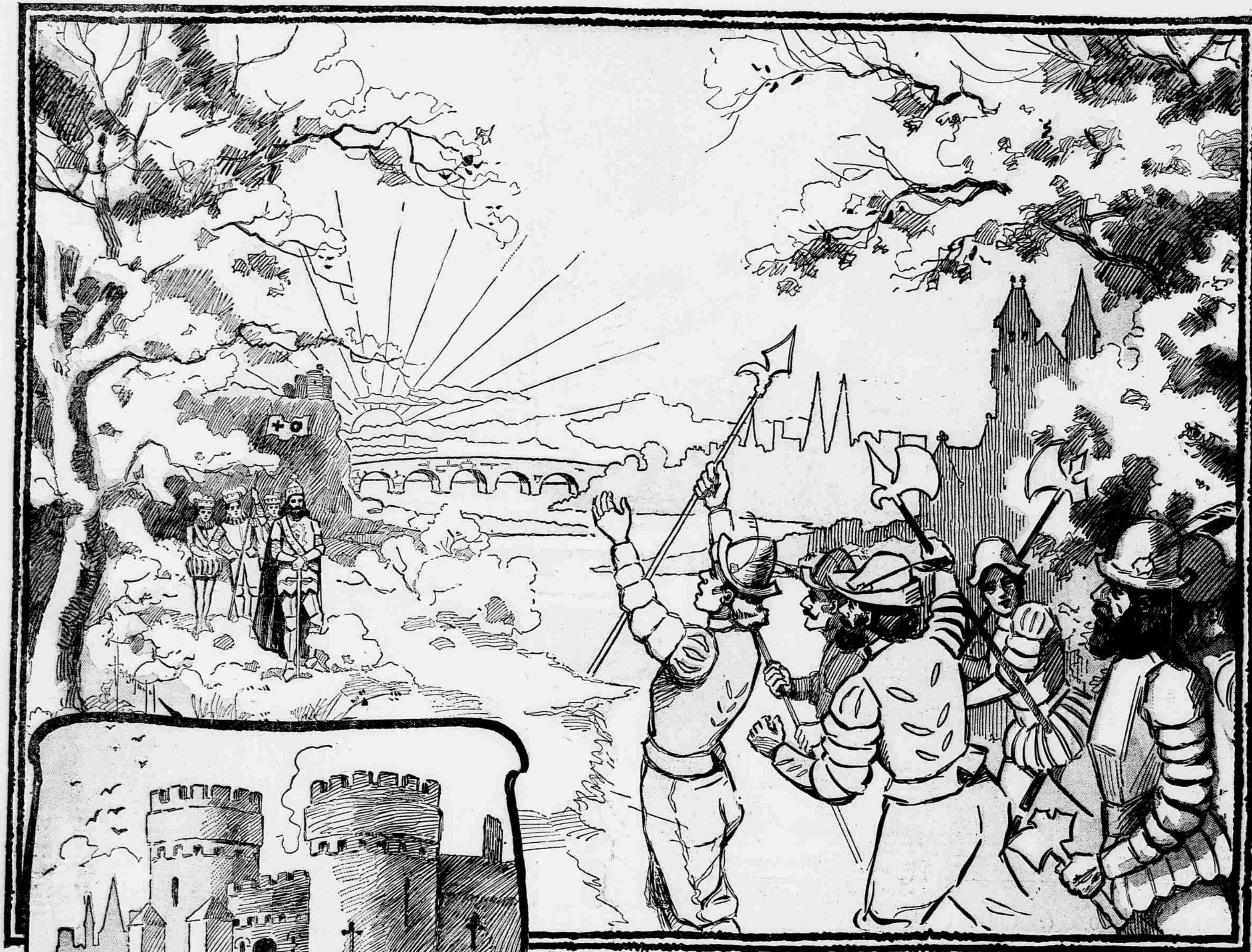


# "LE PROPHETE" at Music Hall To-Morrow Night.

For the First Time in America in the English Language.



## ACT II.—The March on the City of Munster.

from the New York branch of the Castle Square Company.

### CONTRAST.

A scene will be disclosed to the public to-morrow evening, which will be vastly different from that which has prevailed at the Music Hall for the past three weeks. During that time work was steadily going on, but the hall appeared dim and gloomy to the sight, the stage, with its raised curtain, appearing dark and gloomy, like the entrance to a cavern. This was only by contrast, however, and once the stage itself was reached it was found to be a scene of the greatest activity.

All over the floor were stretched wooden frames, covered with canvas, on which painters were busy reproducing the outlines of castles and houses. The castle scene, which requires great attention, was being worked on by several painters, who were putting up the scene in sections. Each battlement and turret of the tower was painted on a separate sheet, and it seemed mysterious to what the smaller pieces were to be attached. This was explained in a moment, however, when a hoarse voice called down something from the upper regions to the men on the stage, and with much creaking and bumping, a castle already painted on canvas came slowly down from the flies where it had been suspended.

This was held up in the rear of the stage and the pieces on which the men were working were fitted to it. They slipped exactly into spaces left for them and completed the realistic aspect of the painted scene. The castle will be moved out from the wall to-morrow, and to the audience will present the appearance of a solid piece of masonry, built upon the stage.

### THE FROZEN LAKE.

As the piece has never been rendered here by the Castle Square Company, great attention is being paid to this scenery in order to make the first appearance of the opera impressive. The greatest care was taken to have all the pieces work smoothly and evenly and to have the parts form a striking whole. Mr. Ritter supervised the

creation of each piece, even to its being stretched upon the frames, which operation, by the way, was effected by the painters, who applied paste liberally to the wooden frame work with a sponge, and then pressed down the edges of the canvas over it.

One of the prettiest scenes in the opera will be the view of the lake, which is supposed to be frozen over and covered with skaters. This is the first scene of the third act, and the camp of the Anabaptists is pictured in a Westphalian forest. Facing the audience is the lake, extending to the horizon, where it is lost in mist. The lake is surrounded by a forest, and the shores are covered with snow. As may be expected, this gives an opportunity for beautiful staging. The sun is supposed to be setting, and its light, shining through the forest and over the lake, makes a striking picture.

The chorus plays an interesting part in this scene, a portion of the girls and men being supposed to be skating over the surface of the lake. They are fitted with roller skates, and the difficulty of breaking in a chorus accustomed only to the ordinary demands of opera so far as gymnastics are concerned may be imagined.

### PLANNING SCENES.

The scene representing the Cathedral at Munster is another piece of magnificent staging. The importance of this scene has caused Mr. Ritter to expend a great deal of time upon its production, and the workmanship is excellent.

All the scenes have been designed by Mr. Ritter personally, and the amount which is left to his care can be imagined by a glance at the charts furnished to him. The ground plan of an operatic production is merely a sheet of paper, on which are drawn roughly a few lines, with some hieroglyphics scribbled over the edges. Mr. Ritter studies one of these sheets occasionally, and seems to derive immediate inspiration from its use. He will also explain it to a questioner:

"This line," he will say, pointing to a pencil stroke drawn roughly down the paper, "represents the back scene. You see it has 'Castle' written behind it, which means that I am to design a castle for the rear. These straight lines at the side, with 'Cottage' written across each one, means

that I am to design a hamlet nestling under the shelter of the castle. These initials at the ends mean the various entrances and show me where I am to leave them. Each piece of scenery must be built up in such a way that it will have the openings where they are necessary for the proper entrance and exit of the singers. When I am handed a slip like this I then design the scenery accordingly.

"Of course, the actual appearance of the scenery, the styles of architecture in vogue at the time and all that sort of thing has to be considered in making up the scene. A small mistake in that line would make the scene appear ludicrous, and has to be carefully avoided."

The chorus is another feature of "The Prophet," which, like the production itself, will be a novelty here. Besides the regular chorus of 100 which will be retained throughout the season, a special chorus of 100 will be added, as well as choir of thirty boys, under the direction of H. H. Darby. All these will be used, the extra supernumeraries for the crowds, the choir for the cathedral scene.

The work of the chorus is an interesting feature to watch. The traditional jealousy in such bodies cuts little figure here, although the members have their sensibilities and exalted ideas of their own importance just as may be found in the higher stage circles. There is plenty of opportunity for studying human nature, however, as exemplified by the various members.

The tendency to drift toward the center of the stage and as close to the footlights as possible is noticeable, especially among the female members, and is only stopped during rehearsals by Director Hagman planting himself near the footlights facing the chorus and moving the members back to where they belong in the general picture. The result is a better distribution of the chorus, and a far more effective appearance of the whole.

### BUILDING A CHORUS.

At the same time that the chorus is being put through its work in a physical way, it is also instructed in a musical way. The orchestra comes in for its share, and Musical Director Adolph Mercang spends his time working over the body. When asked

his opinion concerning the present production, Mr. Mercang had the following to say:

"The Prophet" is generally conceded to be Meyerbeer's chef d'oeuvre. It is a standard opera in all the chief European theaters where it is produced regularly and always successfully during each season. Its popularity has never waned and it is always sure to draw full houses.

"It is, however, one of the most difficult and intricate operas to stage, not alone from the large amount of special scenery needed for its proper and adequate production, but also on account of the difficulty it offers in properly selecting the cast of the singers, who must, at the same time possess marked histrionic abilities. Especially is this the case in the role of Fides, where a voice is required possessing the enormous range from S flat to high B flat. The part also calls for great dramatic force."

"The two greatest exponents of this role are generally said to be Marianne Brand, who sang the part in German at the Metropolitan Opera-house in New York with unvarying success, and Mme. Schumann Heineck, who created a furor lately in that role in several of the leading German houses."

"The choral numbers in the opera require vast numbers of singers, the grand ensemble in the cathedral scene being most complicated and highly effective. It comes to a sublime climax towards the end of the act with an ensemble of 200 persons on the stage."

"There is hardly any doubt but that after its first production in English in this country at the Music Hall, 'The Prophet' will become one of the standard operas in the American grand opera repertoire. That the opera has not been produced in the language before this is probably due to the large expenditure required in its production."

One of the most spectacular scenes, to revert to the staging of the piece, comes at the close of the third act. This is a continuation of the scene portraying the camp of the Anabaptists by the lake. The mist which hangs over the horizon is dispelled as John, the Prophet, closes his exhortation to his followers and urges them against Munster. As the mist clears away the towers and battlements of Munster are seen in the distance and are pointed out by John. The army utters cries of joy and the curtain falls just as they start on their march against the city.

## ACT III.—The Conspirators.

WRITTEN FOR THE SUNDAY REPUBLIC.

Few persons who have not actually witnessed the work necessary in preparing a grand opera, can realize the stupendous labor and expenditure to which a company is subjected if it is to produce the piece in fitting style. Not only must the scenery be complete in every detail and perfectly picture the locality it represents, but the human stage property, the chorus, must also be arranged and broken in with an eye to its surroundings. This last work is as difficult

as the manufacture of the inanimate belongings of the stage.

When an opera is to be produced for the first time in a language, the work is very great. Especially laborious is the task of the musical director, a selection which sounds pleasing and rhythmic in the native language of the opera seeming harsh and uneven when produced in a foreign tongue. In fact, every attache of the company is required to put forth the utmost exertions, and each one's work must be perfect to make a harmonious whole.

A case in point is that of the production of "The Prophet," which has been undertaken by the Castle Square Company. This is the first time the opera has been produced in English, and it is the intention of the management to have the piece complete in every detail. The opportunities for spectacularism afforded in "The Prophet" are such that special work has been going on for several weeks past upon the scenery. This has been supervised by C. H. Ritter, the scenic artist, who was brought here